

[Boom! Lawyered: 'Jane Roe' Lied to Us for Decades](#)

Imani Gandy: Jess, holy shit.

Jessica Pieklo: Whoa.

Imani Gandy: I mean, what, holy, if I may add a fucking, shit.

Jessica Pieklo: Mother Mary of Jesus, what is happening?

Imani Gandy: I don't know, but my mind is fucking blown right now. Just like ... Holy shit.

Jessica Pieklo: I got to get a beer.

Imani Gandy: Yeah.

Jessica Pieklo: Can you give me a second? I need a drink.

Imani Gandy: Yeah, let's get a beer. Okay, good idea.

[music]

So Jess, I was just hanging out on God's green internet this morning when I saw a little link by Cassie da Costa over at the Daily Beast. She's an entertainment writer. When I read the headline, I actually literally yelled in my apartment, holy shit, and then just looked around, even though there's no one else here right now. I was just like, "Are you seeing this? Are you seeing this?" I mean, here's the headline: Jane Roe's deathbed confession; anti-abortion conversion all an act paid for by the Christian right.

Jessica Pieklo: For our listeners who don't know, Jane Roe of Roe versus Wade, right, the big deal, famous abortion rights case we tend to talk a little bit about on this show, had apparently a moment in her life, of conversion, where she basically said, "you know what, I renounce all of my pro-abortion activities and I am born again." That was all wrong and turns out all bullshit.

Imani Gandy: Here's the thing about it. I am not surprised, right? I'm not surprised, but I have to say, I have a lot more empathy now for Norma McCorvey, because I got to read more of what her history and her background was like, and it sounds like she led a really sad life. It also sounds like Christian evangelicals, these anti-choicers, knew that and weaponized that against her much the way they weaponized the first amendment in religious freedom against pregnant people seeking abortion. I mean, it's diabolic for a group of people who claim to be so infused with the love of Jesus, for them to go to a woman like Norma McCorvey and pay her a half million dollars, a half million dollars for her to go and be the public face of their anti-choice movement, knowing that they were using her.

I mean, one of the people who was involved with this admits that they knew that they were using her, but then says, "Oh, but she was using us too." This is a woman who, she was gay. I didn't know that she was gay. I think the article says that she was arrested by police when she was a teenager for committing "sodomy" with another woman in a hotel room. Then she had this long time partner who she had to end a relationship with when she became the face of this movement, but still lived with this woman and died sad. This woman died before her. So she died sad and alone, and her deathbed confession was to say, "Hey guys, this was all bullshit." I mean, Jess, you are way more knowledgeable than I am in terms of the history of the anti-choice movement and the players. So what is your feeling about all of this? You must be like, "I told you, so," in a way, but also "how tragic" in another way.

Jessica Pieklo:

Yeah. I mean, I have a ton of empathy for this woman. Here is a young queer woman in Texas in the 70s who becomes the face of the legal abortion movement, and then basically, she's a mark for evangelicals, and then look at how this becomes weaponized within the movement. So basically, the movement does to all pregnant people what it did to Norma here, right? I mean, look at their crisis pregnancy center models, right? It is identifying people who are vulnerable, pumping them full of garbage and saying that they're looking out for their best interests when they're so clearly not the case. That's one thing that jumps out at me.

Another person or idea that jumps out at me is: as the anti-choice movement has evolved, it's become more cynical. Norma McCorvey may have been a mark, but then we've got Abby Johnson, who's like, "Hey, you know what, I'm going to go ahead and voluntarily weaponize myself for the benefit of the anti-choice movement and do so in a way that is very cynical and lines my own pockets." One thing that I will forever give the anti-choice movement credit for is that they learn from their movement and from their history and are constantly building on that. I think that we could really do a case study here and say, look at all the ways they figured out how to more efficiently target and grift vulnerable people.

Imani Gandy:

Right. You mentioned Abby Johnson, and some of our listeners may not know who she is or just how awful she is. So maybe you want to talk about that a little bit?

Jessica Pieklo:

Yeah! Abby Johnson is a very popular face in the anti-choice movement and had spent a lot of time in pro-choice politics, especially with Planned Parenthood in places like Texas, and had a conversion moment that Norma McCorvey had talked about, and that anti-choice of folks had really leveraged in their attempts to fundraise in anti-choice spaces and affect policy. So Abby Johnson had a self-described conversion moment, becomes extraordinarily anti-abortion, and then goes on to write a bunch of books about how anti-abortion she is and how terrible Planned Parenthood is and makes a very good living doing all of that.

Imani Gandy: That seems to be the string that holds all of this together, right? It's about money. It's about finding people who may have progressive politics, may have forward-thinking politics, but there's no money in being progressive, right? There's no money on the left. There's no money for human rights, for civil rights. So people who may be struggling, and I'm not saying Abby Johnson was, because I think she's just a grifter through and through. But someone like Norma McCorvey who was poor, who was queer, who had nowhere to go and nowhere to turn, you dangle money in front of her and say, "Hey, we just need you to go and say this stuff." It's either take that half million dollars or continue to live this life where you don't have anything.

I understand the impulse, right? I often joke with friends of mine that if I ever wanted to sell out, I would just go over to Fox News and be like, "I'm pro-life now."

Jessica Pieklo: Forget Stacey Dash! [laughter]

Imani Gandy: Could you imagine angry black lady news hour on Fox News-

Jessica Pieklo: I mean-

Imani Gandy: ... where I just renounce everything that I've ever said and believed in for my entire life. If I went to Fox News and offered to do that, they would hire me in an instant, because they have that kind of money and they don't care if you believe what you're saying. All they care is that you say it.

Jessica Pieklo: I think really too, this drives home the idea that the anti-choice movement talks about having pregnant people's interests at heart, but it is always about using them, right? Nobody was really interested in how Norma McCorvey was doing in any of this process.

Imani Gandy: Right.

Jessica Pieklo: They saw her as a means to an end. Pregnant people are always a means to an end for the anti-choice movement. It is never about protecting their interests, their rights, or their wellbeing at all. It is always about a political, a social, a cultural goal that these largely white dudes have.

Imani Gandy: I would also argue that their so called love for the fetus is also bullshit and a means to an end, right?

Jessica Pieklo: Completely.

Imani Gandy: I mean, they're talking about, "got to ... oh, the unborn children. You've got to save the babies." Now here we are in the middle of a global pandemic. We're approaching 100,000 Americans dead, and we're still talking about whether or not we should kill grandma because death isn't really so bad. "Why are we so

obsessed with death? It's just a natural part of life." I mean, the disconnect is jarring.

Jessica Pieklo: Do you remember when we were recording We'll Hear Arguments, right? I mean, Imani and I have an entire series about the arguments for Roe versus Wade. One of the lines of arguments that Texas made was, well, she can just move, right? She made her choice before when she had sex. All of these arguments that you hear now, to go back and hear that Norma McCorvey was then just used by the anti-choice movement, it's like those motherfuckers were showing themselves from the very beginning. When Jay Floyd says she could just move, they were showing themselves. They don't care about her, about any of the other patients. It's about control and power, so.

Imani Gandy: Absolutely, and I mean, it's profoundly depressing. You know what I mean? It's mind blowing and shocking and one of those holy shit moments, but it's also like, here's this woman who led what seems to have been a really tragic life. Now on her death bed, she makes this confession that is going to ... I mean, I don't know how much impact it's going to have. I can imagine that anti-choicers are already in some dungeon somewhere working on damage control and crisis management to figure out what happened. They're going to come out and say, "Oh, in her last dying breath, the president of Planned Parenthood went and held a gun to her head and said, you have to ..." You know what I mean? They're going to come up with some nonsense in order to take the air out of this amazing revelation, because it's truly ... I think for people who are in the movement we're not shocked, but will still surprise, if that makes sense.

I think we all had an inkling that, oh, come on, really, you just had a come to Jesus moment? I think we spent a lot of time angry at her. So I'm glad that I can let that anger go and turn that anger into empathy, and then use maybe that empathy to be able to talk to "pro-life" people in a way that's maybe more productive, right? Because, I mean, frankly, as a movement, we're not doing so hot, and we have to start coming up with ways to bridge this gap that there is between anti-choicers and pro-choicers.

One of those ways to do that, I think, is to talk about the things that we can do to make it so it's easier for pregnant people to have children, right? Force them out of their corners, force them to say, "Yeah, we don't like pregnancy or we don't like abortion, but we also don't like universal healthcare. We also don't like kick- I was going to say Kickstarter. We don't like Kickstarter. [laughter] But force them to really make it clear that they don't care about fetuses, that they don't care about women or pregnant people, that they care about control. Maybe in those conversations, we might be able to find a couple of people who were like, "Yeah, this is crap. We really ought to be more helpful."

Jessica Pieklo: Totally, and it just brought up one final thought for me on this, which is that in this space, I think her story is very much a good example of how agency only works in one direction for the anti-choice movement. Patients only have agency to come out of the pro-choice mindset, right? The idea the only agency Norma

McCorvey here was in her conversion. That inevitably, the response is going to be like you said, in the dungeon. That's going to be like, oh, there was the Cecile Richards being like, "Recant, bitch," something like that, which we know isn't going to happen. So that again, just really driving home that idea of power, which I think she gets to, right, in this Daily Beast article. It's so great. They close with a quote from her, and I just want to read it because it's amazing.

She says, "If a young woman wants to have an abortion, fine," she says coloring in the nursing home, that's Norma McCorvey during the interview, "That's no skin off my ass. You know, that's why they call it choice. It's your choice." Right there, it's just dials right into it. So I'm sorry that it's happened after her death in postmortem. There's part of me that is taking a little bit of enjoyment about maybe she's up there having a cigarette, laughing at Flip Benham, going, "Ha, ha, I got you." But I mean, the reality is though it also has done a ton of damage, and I think that that's going to be a tough space to come to Jesus.

Imani Gandy: Yeah. I also just want to end with, to piggyback off of what you said, the anti-choice movement is not about choice. We call them anti-choice for a reason. They didn't give Norma McCorvey a choice.

Jessica Pieklo: No.

Imani Gandy: They could've decided to try to work with her, try to make her see the light, as it were, and pay for her, give her money to help her through her hard time. No, it was extortion. It was, you say these things and we'll give you this half million dollars. How was that Christianly? I don't understand.

Jessica Pieklo: Yeah, it's a really nice life you got going on, be a shame if something happened to it.

Imani Gandy: Right, it's just-

Jessica Pieklo: It's an evangelical shakedown.

Imani Gandy: It's a total shakedown to the ... I mean, such a shakedown that they forced her to become "ex-gay." So it's really two conversions, conversion from being pro-choice and a "conversion" from being gay, which is whoa, holy shit.

Jessica Pieklo: So all of this information, this big revelation happens in a new FX documentary called AKA Jane Roe. That's out May 22nd. Imani and I are going to watch it. We're going to check it out. It's going to be interesting. At first, I was avoiding this, but now I think I have to, at a minimum, hate watch it. What do you think?

Imani Gandy: Oh, at a minimum, hate watch it, but at a maximum, whiskey watch it.

Jessica Pieklo: Whiskey watch it, that's what we're doing! [laughter]

Imani Gandy: We're going to whisky watch it!

Jessica Pieklo: We are whiskey watching AKA Jane Roe. Join us fellow law nerds for the whiskey watch!

Imani Gandy: Absolutely. I'll tweet out some information and post some stuff in the Facebook group, the Facebook group, Boom! Lawyered. You should join it, answer the questions. If you don't know the answers to the questions, just say something to us that lets me know that you are pro-choice, that you are not an anti-choice ding dong, and that you are on the reaper rights and justice train. On that note, I would like to also say that if you're interested in this topic, in Jane Roe, in Norma McCorvey, Jess and I did an entire podcast series before the world shut down, called ... I mean, it seems like it was a year ago. It was five months ago that we were in Colorado recording the series.

Jessica Pieklo: Five lifetimes ago. I demand a correction.

Imani Gandy: Exactly, but we recorded an entire podcast series. It's called We'll Hear Arguments. We listen to the archival oral arguments of Roe versus Wade, and we break them down and explain them to you in a funny way. It is not boring at all. It's like this podcast, Boom! Lawyered meets Mystery Science Theater 3,000, so go and check that out. That's We'll Hear Arguments. You can find it wherever you get your podcasts, Apple, Google play, Stitcher, Overcast, GeoCities, Yahoo.Sports. I don't know where you get your podcasts from! But you should check it out. We'll Hear Arguments. You can listen to the whole thing, and I think about two and a half hours and it's really, really great.

Jessica Pieklo: We have some people to thank. There are so many of you who have become donors, who are just showing us all this generosity. We are blown away by it. So first of all, let's shout out Steven and Marcia and Alexandra and Jennifer and Kaitlin. Thank you all for helping support Boom! Lawyered and keep this show going.

Imani Gandy: We really appreciate it. If you would like to donate, you can go to rewire.news/boomgive. That's rewire dot news slash B-O-O-M-G-I-V-E. You want to talk to us? You want to just come on Twitter and just say, "Holy shit," with us, you can find me on Twitter @AngryBlackLady. You can find Jess on Twitter @Hegemommy, H-E-G-E-M-O-M-M-Y, and you should follow [@rewire.news](http://rewire.news) @Rewire_News. On that note, we're going to holy shit, what, Jess?

Jessica Pieklo: We're going to see on the tubes, folks.

Imani Gandy: See you on the tubes, folks.

Speaker 3: Boom! Lawyered is created and hosted by Jessica Mason Pieklo and Imani Gandy. Marc Faletti produces the show.